

March 20 – March 23, 2006

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DOMESTIC

1. Belarus Protest Enters Fifth Day, But Lukashenko Stays Firm

Belarusian opposition activists began a fifth day camped in central Minsk as a state media campaign painted them as social pests and President Alexander Lukashenko ignored their protest, AFP reported. About 700 mostly youthful protestors had hunkered down for the night around the tent camp erected on October Square, but only about 200 remained after dawn Thursday

Source: Mediafax; March 23, 2006; <http://www.mediafax.ro/english/>

2. Belarus Election Commission Dismisses Fraud Complaints

The Belarusian Central Election Commission has rejected a complaint by presidential candidate Alexander Kozulin and the non-governmental organization Belarusian Republican Voters Club aimed at declaring the recent presidential elections invalid, Interfax said Thursday.

The complaint, which was sent to the Central Election Commission on March 20, cited results of monitoring violations of Belarusian election law both during the formation of election commissions, the collection of signatures for candidate registration and the actual election campaign.

Alexander Lukashenko's landslide victory over opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich last Sunday sparked a wave of protests in

Minsk's downtown Oktyabrskaya Square, where thousands of Belarusians cheered as Milinkevich called the incumbent leader's presidency illegal and demanded a rerun of the election.

U.S. and European leaders and observers also denounced the authoritarian leader's victory as the product of a climate of fear and repression.

Source: MosNews.Com, March 23, 2006; www.mosnews.com

3. Lukashenko Officially Announced as Winner at Presidential Polls

The Belarusian Central Election Commission officially announced Alexander Lukashenko as the winner at the presidential elections.

The Belarusian Central Election Commission published the official results of the presidential elections on Thursday. Eighty-three percent voted for the incumbent president, common candidate from the opposition Alexander Milinkevich got 6.1 percent of votes, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party Sergei Gaidukevich polled 3.5 percent and leader of the Belarusian Social Democrats Alexander Kozulin – 2.2 percent.

The turnout was 92.9 percent.

Source: Itar-Tass; March 23, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

4. In Cold, Dark Belarus, an Opposition Is Born

By midnight, as the temperature dropped ever lower and dawn was still five hours off, one core of Belarus's public opposition assumed its shape in the darkness.

It was about 300 people, arms interlocked to form a small, dense square, stomping on the frozen ground under a police cadre's contemptuous gaze.

Behind them, inside their human box, another group of demonstrators held their banned flags overhead, a thicket of banners over 20 small tents.

At any moment, the demonstrators said, they expected the police to rush forward, beat them with clubs and drag them off to detention cells. And then their protest would end in blood.

"They may attack and beat us and inflict great trauma," said Stepan Svidersky, 18, a student. "But we have already achieved a result: we have shown our country that we are not afraid to stand against arbitrary rule."

Since a presidential election on March 19, the capital of Belarus has seen a protest like none other in 12 years of President Aleksandr Lukashenko's autocratic grip. For four consecutive days, protesters have defied warnings of arrest and bloodshed and stood in a corner of October Square to demand a new race.

Their numbers rise to several thousand each evening, as they form a rally and impromptu dance party on the edge of an ice rink, and then they dwindle, hour by hour, until midnight, when this core stands through the night in two ranks, to hold the place for the next day.

It is a frigid, risky vigil, given the Belarussian weather and the government's history of reflexive brutality against those who dare to stand and call for better lives than Lukashenko's island of Soviet nostalgia and corruption has been able, or willing, to provide.

Mostly they are young men in their twenties. A few look too young to shave. But since Tuesday night, when the opposition's leaders have disagreed about how best to proceed in their effort to unseat a president they do not recognize, this all-night core has become an independent force in a quixotic struggle.

Their influence emerged when one of Lukashenko's two principal challengers, Alesksandr Kazulin, urged the protesters to disband and save themselves before the police crackdown.

"There is no sense in keeping them on the square," Kazulin said. "We should think about our children, protect them, and not keep them in front of us."

The protesters refused to go. And they rejected being labeled as children as they crowded together in the plummeting temperatures.

One rank faced out of the camp, to warn of any advance by the police, the other inward, to keep an eye on the behavior of the demonstrators, ensuring that no provocateurs had slipped inside.

After midnight, they occupied a portion of Belarus, a country of 10 million people, no larger than 40 square meters, or 425 square feet. It was a country within. They danced on its cold stone. They handed out tea. They said they would not give up.

"We consider this camp to be the only means to defend our position," said Vitaly Korotysh, 22, one of the coordinators of the rally, at 3:30 a.m. "If necessary it will stand for years. And if they break it up, I think on the next day the people will be back."

It is too soon to know whether this is foolishness or resolve.

But their position has been matched by Aleksandr Milinkevich, the second- place finisher in the election, with 6 percent of the vote, far behind the incumbent's 82.6 percent, a result which the protesters see as a cynical fraud.

Milinkevich has said he will be with the demonstrators until the end, whatever shape it may take. It could end with a dwindling of interest, he said, or in a state of violence. But inevitably, he said, the feelings here will grow.

"We live in a country of total fear, and very few people are brave enough to come out like this," he said, standing at front of the ranks at 4 a.m., as the temperature dropped to minus 12 degrees

Celsius (10 Fahrenheit). "This action destroys fear inside the country because it tells people it is possible to fight for your own destiny."

The protesters see little chance of changes in government any time soon. To the extent this is a revolution, Milinkevich often says, it is a revolution not on the streets, but in the mind.

How widely this feeling is spreading is unclear. The students have left their camp and posted rallying cries on the Internet. They have sent text messages via their cellphones to friends.

And they venture away a few hours a day - risking arrest when alone or away from the foreign journalists here - urging others to join them.

They hope for a massive rally on March 25, an unsanctioned celebration of Belarussian independence that Lukashenko despises but this year falls on a Saturday, when potential opposition supporters will not be at work.

But their efforts are squelched by pinpointed arrests when they leave the square, and by state television coverage that has portrayed them as homosexual, drunk and, in the words of one riot police commander, "pathetic."

But ultimately, Milinkevich said, a message exists here that cannot be missed by Lukashenko and his security apparatus, which retains the name KGB. "We are not cattle anymore," he said.

That sentiment was repeatedly expressed here in the darkness, as demonstrators made it clear that it was not merely the election they protested but the entire form of government Lukashenko has built. They decried the arbitrary detentions and smothering of political and economic freedoms, including the freedoms of assembly and speech. And they decried the paired inefficiency and corruption they said were at the center of the administration.

"Those who have a higher education understand that Lukashenko is a commodity profiteer," said Maxim Grechkoyedov, 25, an engineer who said that the government accepts natural gas from Moscow at below-market prices, part of Russia's subsidy of the Belarussian state, and then sells a portion at market prices, keeping the difference for the president and the elite.

Grechkoyedov said the protesters were here because they are part of Belarus's "lost generation," those who have attended universities since the Soviet Union's disintegration and have languished in low-paying jobs and under repression for their adult lives.

Many have had enough, he said; Europe is not supposed to be like this.

An opposition has been born. It is small, but one sign of its early resolve is that almost everyone who stands until dawn not only gives their last name for publication, but insists that it is written down, knowing then that the authorities will see who they are.

"I am tired of the lies," said Aleksandr Zhukov, 21, a student. "I am no longer afraid."

Source: C.J. Chivers, The International Herald Tribune, March 23, 2006; <http://www.ihf.com/>

5. Belarus Opposition to Set Up an Alternative Government

Belarus opposition leader Alexander Kozulin and his campaign headquarters staff are currently working on the plan to set up an alternative government in the country, Gazeta.ru said Wednesday.

The "people's trust government" project will then be introduced to the political council of Belarus democratic forces.

"We are currently developing a proposition to the political council of democratic forces to set up the government of people's trust," press secretary for Alexander Kozulin told Interfax.

Kozulin's staff are negotiating with political and social Belarus activists over the possible work format for the alternative government, the press secretary added.

It is too early to say who will take part in the forming of the new government, she said.

Thousands of Belarusians have been demonstrating on a central Minsk square for four days, swelling the ranks of a core group that had spent the previous night to protest the extension of authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko's rule.

Source: MosNews.Com, March 22, 2006; www.mosnews.com

6. Milinkevich Convinced That Authorities Should Have Announced Runoff

Opposition leader Aleksandr Milinkevich said on Wednesday that he was convinced that there must have been a runoff in Belarus' presidential election. Referring to "various sources," the politician said that he had gained 31 percent of the vote while Aleksandr Lukashenko had garnered 42 percent.

The central election commission announced that the incumbent won with a tally of 82.6 percent. Mr. Milinkevich, who was second with 6 percent of the vote, called the poll fraudulent.

In a visit to the protesters' encampment on Oktyabrskaya Square, he said that the opposition does not plan to storm government buildings during Saturday's rally, which will mark the anniversary of the proclamation of the Belarusian National Republic in 1918.

"On this day we should demonstrate that we are not slaves," he said, but added that he is not a magician and cannot bring a required number of protesters with a wave of a wand.

Mr. Milinkevich condemned Belarusian Television reports portraying the protesters on the square as a drunken and disorderly crowd.

He said that he had come to find out what the protesters needed. Demonstrators asked for more efficient efforts to disseminate information about the protest and for support of jailed participants.

Source: BelaPan; March 22, 2006; <http://www.naviny.by>

7. Protest Against Belarus President Enters Fourth Day

Hundreds of opposition activists in Belarus are in the fourth day of protests against what they consider fraud in the re-election of President Alexander Lukashenko.

The crowds at October Square in Minsk dwindled from late Tuesday when thousands gathered to hear opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich speak. He called on supporters to gather every day until a huge anti-government rally planned for Saturday.

Reports Wednesday, said about 600 people and some 15 tents remained in the square despite frigid temperatures. Opposition activists say police assaulted a protester when he briefly left the square early Wednesday.

Belarus officials have dismissed the protests as pathetic. Mr. Lukashenko has rejected foreign criticism of Sunday's vote in which, according to official figures, he scored a landslide victory.

U.S. and European Union officials say the election was a fraud and warn they are considering new sanctions against Belarus.

Russian election monitors, however, say the vote was free and transparent.

The United States has said President Lukashenko is Europe's last dictator because of his suppression of human rights and free speech.

Source: Voice of America; march 22, 2006; <http://www.voanews.com/>

8. Protests in Belarus Demand New Elections

Protesters staking out the Belarusian capital's main square to demand a new vote in disputed presidential elections found new optimism Wednesday as the sun shone and temperatures climbed above freezing Wednesday. The warming conditions raised the spirits of demonstrators who had been beleaguered by frigid weather since they began their protests Sunday demanding a new vote after that day's election returned authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko to power.

Opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich has urged demonstrators to keep up the daily vigil until a major show of strength Saturday. "I'm glad it's warm, that will help us stay here," said Viktor Donich, a 25-year-old computer programmer, one of about 300 demonstrators forming a human chain around about 15 small tents set up to provide the protesters a bit of emergency shelter. "We will stay here until we win."

The prospects of achieving a huge crowd that could force that victory seemed slim. The rallies attract 5,000-7,000 people at night, but dwindle by about 1 a.m. , when the last city buses make their runs. Nor is there a sense that support is growing. Cars passing the election-night rally the biggest at about 10,000 people blew horns in solidarity. At midday Wednesday there wasn't a honk to be heard.

Milinkevich stood in virtual darkness on Tuesday night as he urged some 700 demonstrators to remain strong and return for a weekend rally. Demonstrators bounced to music and against the cold and chanted "Mi-lin-ke-vich! and "Long Live Belarus ! "Come here every day to speak of freedom," Milinkevich said.

While police have not moved to disperse protesters, they persisted with the arrests and harassment that marked an election campaign widely denounced as unfair. A police commander pledged not to move against the demonstrators, deeming the display too "pathetic" to cause the regime concern. Milinkevich's staff claimed Tuesday that 109 people were detained in connection with the protests, as authorities apparently sought to keep protest numbers down and unsuccessfully to prevent people from bringing food to the tent camp.

Two senior opposition figures, United Civil Party leader Anatoly Lebedko and his deputy, Alexander Dobrovolsky, were detained Tuesday and sentenced to 15 and 10 days in jail, respectively, for participation in an unsanctioned protest. The head of a leading opposition newspaper was detained near the square Tuesday. Showing bruises on his face and chest, protester Mikhail Avdeyev said three riot police beat him up early Wednesday when he left the tent camp to buy cigarettes. He had been carrying the red-and-white national flag that Lukashenko scrapped in favor of a Soviet-style version. He said his attackers tied it in knots when they could not tear it apart.

"They beat me up, but I am still standing here for Belarus ," he said. Riot police regiment commander Yury Podobed told reporters Wednesday that the rally would not be suppressed, Interfax news agency reported. He described the demonstrators as being between 15 and 27 years old and numbering no more than 120.

"I suggest that you climb to the roof of the Republic Palace (located on Oktyabrskaya Square) to take a look at this pathetic scene," Interfax quoted him as saying. According to the official vote count, Lukashenko, a former collective farm director who has been in power for 12 years, won with nearly 83 percent. Popular among many Belarusians for providing economic and political stability, his victory had been expected.

But Milinkevich, who electoral officials said received 6 percent, called the incumbent's tally "monstrously inflated." In an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press, he said a new election should be held, with Lukashenko barred from running. Milinkevich waded into the crowd surrounding the tents with his wife early Wednesday, shaking hands, consulting with protesters about their determination to stay put.

A bearded, silver-gray-haired 58-year-old who has been a physicist, city official and rights activist, Milinkevich has a warm, worn face and a sometimes sheepish smile. Addressing the crowds in the square in a coat and scarf of the opposition's blue color, he acknowledged applause with his arms raised high but his head slightly bowed with humility.

His push for a new vote is supported by the United States which calls Lukashenko a tyrant and along with the EU is mulling over punishment for an undemocratic election but faces major obstacles in the struggle against a leader determined to stay in power. A major test could come Saturday, with Milinkevich calling for protesters to come out in force on the anniversary of the declaration of the first, short-lived independent Belarusian republic in 1918. "We will stay here until the 25th, and on the 25th we will gather here to fight for our future," he said, speaking on the third night of protests, reports the AP.

Source: Pravda.Ru; March 22, 2006; <http://english.pravda.ru/>

9. The Belarus 'Election'

Election monitors did not need to wait for the official vote tally to know that the elections in Belarus lacked, in the words of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, "constitutionally guaranteed rights of freedom of expression, association, and assembly."

President Alexander Lukashenko had muted the independent media and curtailed unsanctioned political rallies, and reports of physical harassment were prominent in the campaign landscape. In addition, Belarussian election officials refused to accurately count the votes. So the monitors from OSCE formally declared the election undemocratic.

After the voting Sunday night, and again on Monday, supporters of the opposition rallied in Minsk, calling for another vote. This display and similar calls from the international community have gone unheeded (and even jeered) by Mr. Lukashenko.

The European Union and the United States were rightly critical of the election, but the international reaction was not entirely uniform. Russia, which has subsidized the Lukashenko regime with cheap oil and gas imports, has been supportive, which should bring a sharp rebuke from the United States. Cheap Russian oil is essential for Mr. Lukashenko's Soviet-style economic system; only with that oil can he contemptuously reject threats of isolation. Forcing the oil price up to market levels would bring internal pressure on Mr. Lukashenko to move Belarus away from economic isolation.

The United States and the EU should also establish objective news outlets modeled on the successful Cold-War-era Radio Free Europe and Voice of America in order to challenge the one-sided coverage of the state-controlled media and undermine Mr. Lukashenko's authoritarian stifling of the media. The White House seems to be on the right track with regard to sanctions, which would include, according to spokesman Scott McClellan, "travel restrictions and targeted financial sanctions of individuals."

Democracy can take hold in Belarus, much as it did in Georgia and Ukraine. Increased visa restrictions for regime officials, freezing personal assets, pressure on Russia to stop its de facto subsidy of the regime and the introduction of a free press will all point toward the dread of Mr. Lukashenko and his supporters -- liberty and democracy.

Source: The Washington Times; March 22, 2006; <http://washingtontimes.com/>

10. Demonstrators Continue Protest in Belarus

Thousands of Demonstrators Defy Belarus Authorities for Third Day of Rallies to Protest Election

Thousands of Belarusians demonstrated on a central Minsk square for the third straight evening Tuesday, swelling the ranks of a core group that had spent the previous night to protest the extension of authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko's rule.

Opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich, who has denounced the election that gave Lukashenko a new five-year term as a fraud and called for a new vote, urged demonstrators to keep up daily protests and called for a major show of strength Saturday.

"Come here every day to speak of freedom," Milinkevich said, speaking in the glow from TV cameras after the lighting on Oktyabrskaya Square was shut off, plunging protesters into darkness and adding to concerns of a crackdown by security forces.

"We will stay here until the 25th, and on the 25th we will gather here to fight for our future," said Milinkevich, who insists he is not the leader of the demonstrations.

Saturday is the anniversary of the declaration of independence of the first, short-lived Belarusian republic in 1918, and a traditional day for Lukashenko's opponents to hold protests.

"The authorities want to destroy this small city of freedom," he said, speaking as the crowd swelled on the third straight night of protests, though it fell far short of the 10,000 who gathered at the first rally Sunday night after polls closed. "We will not let them do it."

The opposition has set up about 15 tents to try to lay the groundwork for around-the-clock actions resembling Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution that forced a rerun of a fraudulent presidential election.

Milinkevich spoke shortly after ambassadors from European Union countries, including Britain, France, Latvia and Lithuania, visited the tent camp to show their support for opponents of a leader who has been branded a dictator by the West.

International observers have said the vote was neither free nor fair, and Europe's main human rights organization said it was a "farce." The United States has called for a new election.

Police have harassed people entering the square but made no move to crack down on the unprecedented protest in this former Soviet republic.

Lukashenko, a former collective farm director who has been in power for 12 years, won the election with nearly 83 percent of the vote, according to official results. Popular among many Belarusians for providing economic and political stability, his victory had been expected.

But Milinkevich, the main opposition candidate, denounced the result as "monstrously inflated" and called for a new vote. He said in an interview with The Associated Press that Lukashenko should be excluded.

"We are demanding a repeat election without the participation of Lukashenko. For us, this is very important. He does not have the constitutional right" to run again, Milinkevich said. He was referring to a referendum denounced by the opposition as rigged that abolished term-limits for the president, opening the way for Lukashenko to stand again.

The opposition is trying to mimic techniques that worked in Belarus' southern neighbor, Ukraine, where the Orange Revolution brought opposition leaders to power. But crowds of 100,000 or more jammed central Kiev for weeks in December 2004, forcing a rerun of a flawed presidential election.

Demonstrators in Minsk occasionally broke into singing "Razom Nas Bahato" ("Together We Are Many"), the emblematic song of the Orange Revolution.

The protest began in Minsk on Sunday evening, when some 10,000 people flooded into the square for a four-hour demonstration that was extraordinary for its size and for the noninterference by usually heavy-handed police.

About 5,000 gathered Monday night, dwindling to some 250 die-hards who stayed overnight, many locking arms to protect the tent camp on the cold paving stones.

"We plan to stay here ... until the moment when the vote is pronounced falsified, when the authorities admit this and a new election is announced," said a 21-year-old student who gave his name only as Alexander, one of a dozen people sitting among the tents.

Tuesday night's protest was about the same size as Monday's. As a few dark-clad police milled near the edge of the crowd, demonstrators sang along with songs blaring from speakers.

In Ukraine and in Georgia's "Rose Revolution" in 2003, protests grew as police did not interfere. But Lukashenko, who has repressed opposition parties and independent media, is seen as unlikely to tolerate any serious challenge to his rule.

Two top opposition figures, United Civil Party leader Anatoly Lebedko and his deputy, Alexander Dobrovolsky, were detained Tuesday and sentenced to 15 and 10 days in jail, respectively, for taking part in an unsanctioned protest. Milinkevich's two sons were detained briefly Monday.

Andrei Denko, head of a leading opposition newspaper called *Nasha Niva*, was detained near the square. Milinkevich's staff also said that 109 people were detained in connection with the protests overnight.

The events in the nation of 10 million have set the West against Russia. Amid U.S. and EU criticism of the vote, Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has been seeking to restore Moscow's influence after Western-backed leaders came to power in Ukraine and Georgia, congratulated Lukashenko on his re-election.

Source: Jim Heintz, ABC News; March 21, 2006; <http://abcnews.go.com>

REGIONAL

11. Putin's Pal in Minsk

President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, who won a third six-year term Sunday in elections that European observers decried as unfair and unfree, is an unregenerate Stalinoid thug. Before the vote, his security service, which still proudly retains the initials KGB, warned would-be protestors that they would be liable for the death penalty if they took to the streets to demonstrate against the rigged election process.

In case that message was not intimidating enough, Lukashenko warned Friday that he was aware of contacts between foreign governments and the political opposition. Said Lukashenko of his closely watched political opposition: "We know where they met, whom they met with, and what discussions they had. God forbid they should try to perpetrate something in the country. We will twist off their heads as though they are ducklings."

This is hardly the discourse of a democrat. It does not even reflect the style of a reformed communist; in the summer of 1991, Lukashenko supported the cluster of hard-line Russian communist leaders who attempted a coup by ostensibly kidnapping Mikhail Gorbachev. Indeed, the former collective farm boss who has ruled Belarus with an iron hand since 1994 has warmly praised Hitler, saying the Nazi fuehrer "deserved credit for forming a strong state."

Lukashenko stays in power by means of fierce repression, control of the media, and a state-run economy that survives on subsidized natural gas and oil from his patron in the Kremlin, Russian President Vladimir Putin. The value of those subsidies runs between \$3 billion and \$5 billion a year. Lukashenko uses this funding to provide scant but stable salaries and pensions to workers who toil in an economy that is impervious to the rules of supply and demand. As in Soviet times, uncompetitive factories producing shoddy, undesirable goods are propped up with credit from state-run banks.

With protests ongoing in Minsk, the United States and the European Union are threatening Lukashenko's regime with sanctions as a consequence of Sunday's sham election. However much Lukashenko's inner circle might be inconvenienced by visa bans or by efforts to freeze their foreign bank accounts, the only near-term threat they need fear would come from Russia. If Russia's state-controlled energy company Gazprom raises the steeply discounted prices it charges Belarus for energy, it could shatter the Soviet-style social contract that keeps Lukashenko in power.

Thus far, Putin has been willing to pay the upkeep for an embarrassing ally. When Putin hosts the other members of the G-8 this July in St. Petersburg, they ought to tell him Lukashenko is not a fit protegee for a Russia with democratic pretensions.

Source: The Boston Globe; March 22, 2006; <http://www.boston.com/news/globe/>

12. Ukrainian Official Opposes Sanctions Against Belarus

The speaker of the Ukrainian parliament spoke Wednesday against imposing sanctions on Belarus in the wake of March 19 presidential elections.

"I am against Ukraine supporting any sanctions against Belarus," Volodymyr Lytvyn said. "We should not teach people democracy while we have many problems of our own."

He said Ukraine, whose incumbent authorities came to power in 2004 following a wave of popular protests against the results of a presidential vote, should respect the choice made by the Belarusian people.

"If the results had been about 53% against 47%, then we would have a reason for action," Lytvyn said. "Although, the ratio there is different and we should respect people's choice."

Incumbent leader Alexander Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington, was re-elected for a third five-year term with 82.6% of the vote. Opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich was a distant second with 6%, while Liberal Democratic leader Sergei Gaidukevich garnered 3.5%, and Alexander Kozulin, leader of the Social-Democratic Party, took 2.3%. Turnout was officially 92.6%.

Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, a loose union of ex-Soviet republics, have recognized the elections. The United States and the European Union have called for a re-run and said they are considering imposing sanctions against Belarus.

Source: Pavel Dulman, RIA Novosti, March 22, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

13. Russian Ambassador: Belarus Vote Outcome Must Be Accepted

No opposition claims of irregularities in the electoral process in Belarus can call into question the results of the March 19 presidential elections in the country, Russian Ambassador to Belarus Alexander Surikov said at a meeting with Belarusian Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky in Minsk on Wednesday.

"The electoral process itself and its results indicate that the people's choice was unambiguous," he said.

Commenting on protests being staged by supporters of former presidential candidates Alexander Kozulin and Alexander Milinkevich, Surikov said that "there are about 100 people on [Oktyabrskaya] square. They express the opinion of a group of people," he said.

"I think that Belarus now has every right to continue to freely move along its chosen path," the ambassador said.

Source: Interfax; March 22, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

14. Ex-Kyrgyz President Upbeat About Belarus Elections

President of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akayev said Wednesday he was pleased with the victory of the incumbent Belarus president at the recent election.

"I can only say good words about [Alexander] Lukashenko," he told a news conference at RIA Novosti. "We were good colleagues in the past."

Akayev sharply criticized Western views of Lukashenko, who Washington has dubbed "Europe's last dictator", calling such epithets "a great exaggeration." He also expressed his "sympathy toward the Belarus people."

With about 300 demonstrators camped out on the main square of the capital, Minsk, in protest against Lukashenko's landslide win in Sunday's vote, Akayev said he was impressed with the "peaceful response" of the Belarusian opposition to the election results and the restraint shown by the Belarusian authorities.

Meanwhile, the Belarus opposition continued Wednesday its protests with claims of vote rigging, but asked supporters to refrain from causing trouble.

The opposition's official site posted a message instructing the protesters to avoid any confrontation with the police and show policemen their personal belongings if asked to do so.

"Do not refuse [to show your belongings]," the message said. "If they [the police] attempt to search you personally, it is an official search and they need a warrant."

Former collective farm boss Lukashenko, whose regime has also been branded an "outpost of tyranny" by Washington, was re-elected for a third five-year term with 82.6% of the vote. European representatives said polling had been conducted in a "climate of intimidation," but the president is known to have support in his homeland for providing relative economic stability in comparison with other former Soviet states.

Opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich was a distant second with 6%, while Liberal Democratic leader Sergei Gaidukevich garnered 3.5%, and Alexander Kozulin, leader of the Social-Democratic Party, took 2.3%. Turnout was officially 92.6%.

Source: RIA Novosti, March 22, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

15. Three Georgians Deported From Belarus Over Election Protests

Georgian nationals detained in Belarus for taking part in opposition protests against alleged election fraud have been deported, Georgian television reported Wednesday.

Rustavi 2 said clergymen Malkhaz Songulashvili and Basily Kobakhidze and religious-studies scholar Lado Gogiashvili, arrested in the Belarusian capital Monday after joining a rally in support of Belarusian opposition attempts to dispute Sunday's election results, have now been expelled from the country and banned from reentry in the next five years.

Georgia's Foreign Ministry and parliament sent official demands for the men's immediate release after they were arrested.

Belarusian opposition supporters took to the streets Monday to protest the results of the weekend's presidential polls, and have continued their rally into Wednesday. They are calling for a revote, saying Sunday's election was rigged in favor of incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko.

According to the official tally, Lukashenko, dubbed "Europe's last dictator" by Washington, won a third term with 82.6% of the vote. The main opposition candidate, Alexander Milinkevich, garnered just 6%.

Source: RIA Novosti, March 22, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

16. Activists Deported From Belarus Say They Will Return

Democracy activists from Ukraine who were deported from Belarus spoke about their experiences in the neighboring country at a press conference in Kyiv on Tuesday.

Members of the "National Alliance" who were whisked out of Belarus by train after presidential elections in that country over the weekend said that Belarusian officials accused them of attempting to destabilize the situation in that country. Official Minsk forcibly detained a 5 Kanal news crew prior to the elections, and members of the Pora political party have been banned from that country.

National Alliance head Ihor Huz said on Tuesday that his organization will continue sending people to support the opposition in Minsk. He said that activists will travel in small groups and cross the border into Belarus at various locations. And the latest information from Minsk - several thousand protesters in the small tent city in the city's October Square have been surrounded by a perimeter of police. 5 Kanal reported on Tuesday that some 100 protesters have been arrested in Belarus since the protests began on Sunday.

Source: Kanal 5; March 21, 2006; <http://5tv.com.ua/eng>

17. Ukrainian Foreign Ministry Views Politics of Isolation of Belarus As Inefficient

Ukraine will strive for flexibility and avoiding moves, which would hamper bilateral relations, in a dialogue with Belarus, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's spokesman Vasyl Filipchuk said in Kyiv today.

Though Ukraine joined documents and statements on Belarus, which were adopted within the framework of the EU and UN and concerned the democracy and human rights in that country, its position should not be identified with the positions of the EU, he specified. Ukraine's relations with Belarus have deep, historical roots and enjoy positive trade dynamics, due to which fact trade turnover between the two countries amounted to more than two billion USD, the diplomat reminded.

Source: National Radio Company of Ukraine (NRCU); March 21, 2006; <http://www.nrcu.gov.ua/>

18. Lukashenko's Win May Speed Up Union State creation

The incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko's victory in the Belarusian presidential election may speed up the creation of the Russia-Belarus Union State, Russian Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov has said.

"Now, that he has received the people's firm and vast support, the Belarusian president may be more active in transforming positions on such issues as a common currency and many others," Mironov told the media on Tuesday. "It will be realistic to expect some sort of an articulate decision on the Union State Constituent Act and some other practical results by the end of the year."

The Russian Federation Council speaker said he understood and accepted the choice of the Belarusian people.

As for the stance of some western countries and international organizations critical of the Belarusian election, he said "it does not matter at all."

"Whether some may like it or not, the choice of the Belarusian people is a reality," Mironov said.

Source: Itar-Tass; March 21, 2005; <http://www.tass.ru/eng>

19. Alexy II Congratulates Lukashenko on Victory in Elections

Moscow, March 21, Interfax - Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia has sent a congratulation to Alexander Lukashenko on his victory in the presidential elections in Belarus, wishing him God's help in his work for the good of the people.

'Seeing the impressive results of your previous work in this office, the multinational people of the republic have again given you a vote of confidence through supporting your candidature by a majority of votes', the patriarchal messages says.

Alexy II also pointed to the fact that in all situations and trials the people of Belarus set an example of 'courageous stand for their land, faithfulness to their old traditions, spiritual strength, sensitivity and kindness.'

'As primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, I am very much gratified with the fact that good relations have been established between the religious and secular leaders in Belarus in the last years. These relations are called to show common concern for the restoration of shrines ruined in the past, for religious education, Christian enlightenment and moral health of society,' the document notes.

Patriarch Alexy also expressed hope for further development of church-state cooperation, 'which promotes the spiritual unity and moral and material well-being of the fraternal Belarusian nation,' the Orthodox Encyclopedia church research center has reported on Tuesday.

Source: Interfax; March 21, 2006; <http://www.interfax.ru/e>

INTERNATIONAL

20. EU To Consult Before Deciding On Belarus Sanctions

The European Union today said it was consulting neighbouring countries before deciding on any sanctions on Belarusian officials following presidential elections in the ex-Soviet country, and would also talk to Russia.

EU foreign ministers said on Monday they were likely to impose sanctions on top political leaders in Belarus after declaring fraudulent the election that gave authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko a third consecutive term.

The 25-member bloc would consult all candidates for EU membership, countries in the western Balkans and other neighbours, such as Norway, before making a decision, Austrian State Secretary for European Affairs Hans Winkler told the European Parliament in Brussels.

"It's important that anything we do is done on the basis of a very broad agreement," Winkler said on behalf of the EU, as his country holds the rotating EU presidency. "We must also talk to Russia."

The sanctions are likely to include a wider travel ban on Belarusian officials. The EU's current ban covers only half a dozen or so people, and Lukashenko is not among them.

Source: Evening Echo; March 23, 2006;

<http://www.eveningecho.ie/news/bstory.asp?j=176946898&p=y769476x4&n=176947658>

21. OSCE Chairman Karel De Gucht Concerned Over Continuous Detentions Amid Post-election Developments in Belarus

The OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, has expressed his deep concern at the continuing arrests, detentions and arbitrary court trials of political and civil society activists following the 19 March presidential election in Belarus.

"The Belarusian authorities must immediately put an end to the persecution of their opponents. We have received information of over 200 detentions in the first three days following the elections, mainly linked to the peaceful demonstration that is taking place in Minsk. It is unacceptable that people are being detained for trying to uphold their right to assemble and to express their views in a peaceful way", said Minister De Gucht.

"In this light, I urge the Belarusian authorities to release all the people detained in connection with these activities. And I also urge the authorities to show restraint and refrain from repressive actions", he declared.

The Chairman-in-Office stressed that he will continue to closely follow post-election developments, in co-ordination with the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and other relevant OSCE institutions. The ODIHR will focus on restrictions or violations of human rights related to post-election events.

Over 200 supporters of the democratic opposition are known to be in prisons, detention centres or to have been sentenced in court. The Chairman-in-Office and the ODIHR have received confirmation of approximately 20 additional detainees in the cities of Brest, Grodno and Vitebsk. Many of those detained were seized by police when leaving October Square in the centre of Minsk, where the opposition has held a continuous demonstration since Sunday night. In some cases, detainees have been beaten during arrest.

No information has been made available by the authorities about who is being held, prior to their court hearings. A heavy police presence on the street also affects pedestrians, who have their bags searched for any supplies for the demonstrators.

Source: OSCE; March 23, 2006; <http://www.osce.org>

22. Belarus No Less Democratic Than Latvia, Estonia - Analyst

Two of the European Union's newest members are less democratic than the much-criticized Belarus, a prominent Russian political scientist said Thursday.

Sergei Markov, the head of the Moscow-based Institute for Political Studies, criticized Belarus' former Soviet stable mates, Latvia and Estonia, which joined the EU in 2004, for effectively disenfranchising a quarter of their population and weighed into the debate about whether sanctions should be levied against Minsk following the incumbent leader's disputed recent landslide reelection.

"Latvia and Estonia are less democratic states than Belarus," he said. "As far as sanctions are concerned, they should be imposed on Latvia and Estonia, which have completely excluded 25% of their residents from political life."

Relations between Russia and the two Baltic states have long been marred by controversy over the status of ethnic Russians, who Moscow has often stated are deprived of basic rights.

Markov dismissed Western criticism of Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, who Washington has dubbed "Europe's last dictator" for his authoritarian regime, saying that he had rescued the country from some of the pitfalls that other newly independent countries fell into after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"People in Belarus consider Lukashenko to be the [country's] savior from oligarchs and gangsters," he said.

Although the Belarusian opposition and European bodies have questioned Lukashenko's 83% election triumph on Sunday, the 51-year-old former collective farm boss, who has been in power since 1994, is known to have support in his homeland for providing relative economic stability in comparison with other former Soviet states.

Markov said Lukashenko had achieved great economic success.

"The [country's] trade with the European Union is at a higher level than with Russia," he said.

The political scientist said that the West would put more pressure on Belarus after the reelection of Lukashenko, who refused to join the "Western anti-Russian coalition and to create a so-called cordon sanitaire around Russia."

He added that Belarus would need investment in the future and one possible way to obtain it would be through a long-discussed union with Russia, based on a model of "one country - two systems."

The idea of a union state first emerged in 1997 to foster political and economic integration, in particular by standardizing taxes and tariffs, but has largely remained on paper. Belarus was to have adopted the Russian ruble as a single currency for the state in 2005, but the move has been postponed.

Sunday's elections in Belarus were held amid intense international scrutiny and what Lukashenko Monday termed "unprecedented pressure from abroad" and an "aggressive opposition profile".

Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a loose union of ex-Soviet republics, said the elections in Belarus were in line with international standards. The United States and the European Union, however, have called for a re-run and said they are considering imposing sanctions against Belarus.

Source: RIA Novosti, March 23, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

23. Baltics Look On Helplessly As Lukashenko Steals Election and Opposition Forces Protest

Leaders of all three Baltic states expressed their strong disapproval of the Belarusian presidential election, which resulted in the incumbent Aleksandr Lukashenko mustering 82 percent of the vote. Baltic politicians slammed the poll as undemocratic and non-transparent.

President Valdas Adamkus was quoted in a press release as saying, "Just like the rest of the world, I was surprised by the number of detained election campaign participants, the monopoly on the media and intimidating statements by representatives of the administration. Is that how state leaders should be elected in Europe in the 21st century?"

Lithuanian MPs expressed solidarity with Belarus' democratic opposition and tried to put a positive spin on the defeat by saying that the country's democratic forces "are waking up."

Thousands of people gathered in Minsk's October Square to protest the results, which all Western observers have censored in no uncertain terms. Famous Belarusian ensembles played on stage, while the crowd waved the forbidden white-red-white Belarusian flag. Cheers could be

heard for top opposition candidate Alexander Milinkevich, who stood among the demonstrators and encouraged them to bring along friends and relatives.

Milinkevich is confident that Belarus will see a re-election. "Victory will be ours. God is with us. Freedom, truth and justice are on our side," he says. Independent surveys presented during a round-table discussion in Lithuania's Parliament on March 20 showed that Lukashenko may have actually only received 43 percent of the vote, while Milinkevich received 31 percent. Alexander Kozulin, another opposition candidate who is an ally of Milinkevich, took 18 percent.

International observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said the election did not comply with generally-accepted standards and was neither free nor fair. The OSCE had already criticized intimidations and repressions toward opposition groups during the election run-up. The OSCE's report prompted the EU and United States to consider sanctions against the Lukashenko-regime.

Alexander Milinkevich's press officer, Paval Mazhejka, told The Baltic Times that four members of Milinkevich's staff, including head of the United Civic Party Anatoly Lebedko, were beaten up and detained when they left October Square early on March 21. Police in Minsk reported that an additional 16 people had been detained, while the opposition estimates more than 100 arrests.

Two Estonian observers of the election were detained by police on March 20 but were soon released. The observers, Tonis Leht and Erik Moora, were detained near Minsk's central square. Security police officials reportedly shouted phrases such as "Let's go now, fascist," and "Don't come and stage your orange revolution here." Erik Moora told the Baltic News Service that he and Leht were likely arrested by accident in one of numerous round-ups.

Mazhejka said the demonstrations would go on as long as people show up, which heavily depends on the international community's reaction: "Western countries must not approve the election results and should keep their focus on October Square," he said.

Maria Svensson, president of the Swedish non-governmental organization Cultural Clinic, who spent several nights with the people in October Square, was surprised by the protesters' determination. All of them, she said, repeatedly called out one phrase: "Don't leave us now!"

In Vilnius, a parliamentary round-table discussion highlighted the demonstrations in Minsk. Politicians, members of international NGOs as well as politicians in Brussels and Washington who were present through a TV-cam were looking for solutions to boost democracy in Belarus.

They all agreed that it was inevitable for the European Union and the United States to have one unanimous position toward Belarus. However, approaches differed.

While Louis O'Neill from the U.S. State Department and U.S.-Congressman Thaddeus McCotter favored economic sanctions, Lithuanian MP Vaclav Stankevich underscored the necessity of cooperating with the official administration of Belarus in order to influence legislation that might foster democracy.

MP Egidijus Vareikis opined that, while playing by Lukashenko rules, it was not worth considering that any other candidate would win. He drew a parallel to former U.S.-president Ronald Reagan and his strong stance toward the Soviet Union.

"But where's our Reagan in this case?" he asked rhetorically.

Trygve Olson, director of the International Republican Institute's Belarus office, which is based in Vilnius, stressed that the time has come to take definite measures. "The Belarusian opposition set up their goals last year, which was to support one single candidate who will go to the streets if Lukashenko manipulates the election," said Olson.

“Those people are now in October Square, while we talk, talk, and talk. If we had established independent radio stations and television channels on a large scale, we might have 50,000 or more people on the square, not 10,000. We should feel ashamed,” said Olson, who is barred from Belarus.

Maria Svensson in Minsk had a first-hand experience of what Olson meant by that: “These demonstrations mark a turning point, for sure. But it might be too early for a colored revolution in Belarus.”

Meanwhile in Riga, around 20 young activists from the organization Open Belarus staged a picket in front of the Belarusian Embassy on March 21 to express solidarity with their eastern neighbor.

All three Baltic governments echoed this unity in a joint resolution denouncing political repression in Belarus.

The European affairs committees of the Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian and Polish parliaments passed the document, which condemned attacks on the mass media, journalists, opposition leaders, human rights activists and minorities in Belarus. The resolution also “denounces the repressions carried out by Belarus authorities against the representatives and leaders of civic society who promote, with their work, democratic processes in Belarus.”

The authors voiced regret over the deteriorating political situation in Belarus, as well as human rights violations in the country.

At the same time, the signatories express support for free and democratic presidential elections in Belarus and “for all democratic forces in Belarus resisting the official power and its wish to restrict the process of transparent and fair elections and the exercise of human rights.”

The MPs have asked all EU member states, as well as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and other international institutions to “provide substantial and coordinated support to democratic forces and civic society in Belarus.” They also urge the EC to consider a new strategy regarding relations with Belarus, if the country fails to observe international standards of democracy.

Source: Sven Becker, The Baltic Times; March 22, 2006; <http://www.baltictimes.com/>

24. Belarusian opposition’s Milinkevich Not To Attend EPP Summit

Belarusian opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich, who ran for president on Sunday, cannot accept the invitation by Czech Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda and the European People’s Party (EPP) to attend the upcoming EPP summit, EP sources told CTK today.

The sources said that Milinkevich believes he should remain in Belarus these turbulent days, when the opposition is planning further demonstrations against the regime of Alexander Lukashenko, who was re-elected president.

The opposition and the West however say the elections were rigged.

The EP sources also indicated that Milinkevich is not sure of Lukashenko’s regime allowing him to return home if he left it now.

The EPP summit is scheduled for Thursday, on the eve of the EU summit in Brussels.

The EPP reportedly plans to invite Milinkevich to attend its conference in Rome next week, which will be attended by many politicians, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Svoboda (Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People’s Party, KDU-CSL) announced in Brussels on Monday that he would invite Milinkevich to the EPP summit on Thursday. He said

this would be the best possible reaction to the Belarusian elections which the EU described as unjust.

"It would be stronger than anything else if Milinkevich could meet, immediately after the elections, prime ministers from the EU countries who would embrace him and tell him 'you embody democracy in our view, we take you as our partner.' In my opinion, this is the nearest possible correct step," Svoboda told journalists after the EU Council meeting.

Source: The Prague Daily Monitor; March 22, 2006; <http://www.praguemonitor.com/>

25. Belarus's Message to Europe

Europe's retreat in face of populist revival and protectionist fear offers little attraction to a perplexed Belarusian, says Krzysztof Bobinski in Warsaw.

Belarus appears to be the one place in Europe where voters have chosen populism and protectionism without even trying democracy or liberalism first. Polish television journalists reporting on the aftermath of the presidential election there never tire of telling their viewers at home that the thousands of demonstrators in Minsk's Oktabskaya Square have "surmounted their fear of the riot police" and come out to protest. But the numbers are too small and already following three nightly assemblies since the election of 19 March 2006 – dwindling. The fact remains that for Alexander Lukashenko to be toppled his people will first have to overcome their fear not of him but of the free market and democracy.

Poland's rightwing government elected in October 2005 isn't doing much to help. In truth young Poles, seeking to relive their parents' adventure with Solidarity, are wholeheartedly behind Alexander Milinkevich, the main opposition candidate. The government is officially projecting the message of liberation. But at home the twin brothers Kaczynski (Lech the president, and Jaroslaw the head of the ruling party, Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc [Law & Justice]), are saying that the sixteen years since the fall of communism in Poland have been an unmitigated failure – a time dominated by crooks and cryptocommunists as well as liberals and their cronies. If Poland is to be at peace with itself, they imply, it needs to be freed of ill-defined but definitely malevolent and cosmopolitan forces. This, not the juvenile voices of solidarity, is the message seeping through to Belarus.

Elsewhere in the region a populist wave is on the rise and the air is thick with cocks coming home to roost – be it of the failure since 1989 to combat corruption, strengthen state structures or reform welfare states so that those who fail in the brave new free-market world don't have to fear the abyss.

Who could blame the Belarusian in front of his television set watching all this (and keeping a wary eye on the far-from-perfect progress of reform in Ukraine or Georgia) for leaning over to his wife and whispering: "I think we should sit this one out"?

In bitterly cold Minsk some young people hold the European Union's blue-and-gold starred flag aloft – to them, the opposite of everything their ruler stands for – in their own gesture of solidarity. But isn't the message that the EU, or at least some of its memberstates, is sending out today also one of protectionism and populism? The failure of the services directive www.openDemocracy.net 2 Belarus's message to Europe exposed all the problems of bringing high- and lowcost national economies together into one single market. Sluggish economies such as Germany's have kept up the barriers to workers from the new memberstates. Meanwhile, the process of ratification of the European constitution is stuck in the sidelines following the French and Dutch referenda of 2005. At the same time, confident and high-growth economies like Ireland's are welcoming immigrant labour. This suggests that the solution to many of Europe's current problems must start with a refueling of its economic dynamism: in particular, by spurring growth in the larger countries – France, Italy and Germany.

But will the current trend towards protectionism help? France, Spain and Italy are seeking to foster and safeguard "national champions" counter to the logic of the single market. In Germany

too, the same impulses are at work. In France, hundreds of thousands of young people have come out to demonstrate against labour-market reform, and in a more widely defensive spirit.

Indeed the present revolt – like the rebellion of the immigrant banlieues in October-November – was heralded on 29 May 2005 when the French rejected the EU constitution in a gesture of disgust with their elites. The French are flirting with populism as they show an apparent inability to cope emotionally with the challenges of capitalism. The free-market project is suffering similar problems in several new memberstates, most notably Poland.

Belarus appears to be most solid in its rejection of the free market and democracy. If that is to change then the major economies in the European Union must reform to regain their sense of drive. That renewed self-confidence can then be projected to the wobbly post-Soviet countries now part of a disparate EU, and supporters of the European project in Poland (and countries further east) will in turn gain arguments against the economic nationalists.

When all that happens, the beleaguered democrats in Belarus will begin to see the population lining up behind them. Until then, the mass of the population will stay at home watching Lukashenko on TV.

Source: Krzysztof Bobinski; OpenDemocracy.net; March 22, 2006; <http://www.opendemocracy.net>

26. OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Briefs Participating States on Belarus Election

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Alcee L. Hastings told the Organization's 55 participating States at a special meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council that the Parliamentary Assembly was willing to "continue dialogue with the Belarusian parliament as well as other authorities in Belarus."

Speaking about his role as Special Co-ordinator of the OSCE election observation mission to the 19 March presidential election in Belarus and the mission's preliminary statement that the polls had failed to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections, he said:

"The right to vote, the right to have your vote counted as well as the right to run for office and carry out a campaign in an atmosphere free of pressure and intimidation is a fundamental requirement for democracy."

"The Belarusian people deserve better," he said.

"Having said all of this, I would like to encourage the Government of Belarus and all of us to continue to work to support the development of democracy in Belarus. The criticism that was presented yesterday was done so in a constructive spirit," Hastings added.

In his speech, Hastings also stressed the Assembly's general role in the OSCE's election observation activities.

"As politicians who have fought elections themselves, parliamentarians have particular expertise in political campaigns and electoral processes, bringing added credibility to the conclusions of OSCE observation missions," he said.

Hastings, a United States Congressman from Florida, was also appointed by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, as Special Co-ordinator for the election observation mission for the upcoming parliamentary elections in Ukraine on 26 March.

Source: Noticias.info; March 22, 2006; <http://www.noticias.info/>

27. EU and USA Looking For Ways To Pester Belarus Over Supposed Election Fraud

The recent presidential election in Belarus has not caused a stir in the West. Foreign politicians have released quite languid statements regarding Alexander Lukashenko's victory. Official statements have been released from the US administration, NATO, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. The officials, however, withheld comments. Only US officials called upon the Belarus administration to revise the election results. It is noteworthy that eleven civilians were killed in Iraq on the day when the above-mentioned announcement was made from the White House. European leader released no comments on the matter: the elections in Afghanistan and Iraq can hardly be referred to as "more democratic" in comparison with Belarus. However, the elections in the two war-torn countries meet Washington's interests and therefore avoid any criticism.

The US administration refused to acknowledge the results of the presidential election in Belarus. American officials supported the Belarusian opposition and said that the new election should be held. Scott McClellan said that the pre-election campaign in Belarus had been conducted in the atmosphere of fear. The official added that the US government could only admire the courage of Belarusian democrats. Mr. McClellan added that the US administration was considering actions that could be taken against the Belarusian government. The US official made bold to speak on behalf of the European Union as well. According to him, the USA and the EU were going to take measures against several Belarusian officials responsible for falsifications and violations of human rights.

An official spokeswoman for the European Commission Emma Udwin said that the EU was not going to introduce economic sanctions against Belarus. The EU intends to take prohibitive measures against several officials responsible for the violation of democratic rights during the presidential election in Belarus. The EU has thus taken quite a reasonable stance towards Belarus: many European Countries receive Russian fuel via its territory.

NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer also criticized the election in Belarus. Mr. Scheffer referred to the opinion of OSCE observers and described the vote as "non-democratic." The NATO Secretary General urged the Belarus administration to respect the euro-Atlantic democratic norms, including the ones which Minsk is obliged to observe being a member of the Partnership for Peace program.

It is obvious that Europe will have to criticize Alexander Lukashenko because of the USA's influence in the OSCE. It is not ruled out that foreign ministers of this organization will approve a negative statement against Belarus. Such an attack will cause damage to Russia as well taking into consideration Russia's unfriendly relations with this organization. The OSCE, which sent 500 observers to Belarus, harshly criticized the elections on Monday. Alcee Hastings, president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, conducted a press conference in Belarus' capital Minsk and said that the presidential election in the country had failed to comply with international standards. In particular, the Belarusian authorities denied 19 OSCE officials visas. Hastings added that Lukashenko's four rivals did not have equal possibilities and added that the persecution and arrests of certain political figures had created an atmosphere of fear in the Belarusian society. The official said nothing about any violations committed during the voting. The OSCE is expected to expose a detailed report on Belarus in six or eight weeks.

OSCE spokespeople pointed out, though, that all candidates running for presidency had been provided with two hours of free time that they could use on TV or radio channels. One can therefore conclude that the criticism of the West comes to general remarks about the "non-democratic election" in Belarus.

Source: Pravda.Ru; March 22, 2006; <http://english.pravda.ru/>

28. Once Upon a Time

If you believe in the tooth fairy, leprechauns and the Loch Ness monster, then you'll love the announced results of the March 19 presidential election in Belarus.

According to the authorities running this police state, President Alexander Lukashenko won a third consecutive term in office by capturing an unbelievable 82.6 per cent of the popular vote, compared to a mere six per cent for main opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich.

That's the problem. Such lopsided results are exactly that – unbelievable.

International observers have labelled the vote fraudulent. Europe's main human rights organization called the election a "farce." The United States says it will not recognize the results, instead demanding a new election and threatening to impose sanctions otherwise.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, pleased he has retained at least one ideological ally on his border, has meanwhile welcomed Mr. Lukashenko's "victory," saying he looked forward to "building the union between us and ensuring the consistent democratic development of our countries."

Mr. Putin's definition of "democracy," however, appears at odds with the political system as it's understood in the West. The Russian leader combined his comments on the Belarus election with a warning to the U.S. against "the export of democracy." But though Mr. Putin may wish to term the obviously manipulated results of such so-called elections a culturally different form of democracy, that's just plain Orwellian doubletalk. The bottom line is that Mr. Putin desperately needs Belarus as an ally against the ever-increasing influence of the West, and rigging elections is, after all, a time-honoured tradition in the former Soviet sphere.

The Belarus election results are a sham. The West should stand its ground and refuse to recognize Mr. Lukashenko's government as legitimate. The opposition in that country deserves no less.

Source: The Chronicle Herald; March 22, 2006; <http://thechronicleherald.ca>

29. Belarusian Leader Lukashenko Invited to Cuban NAM Summit

The president of Belarus has been invited to attend a summit of one of the world's largest movements seeking to promote national independence and oppose colonialism and imperialism, the Belarusian foreign minister said Wednesday.

Sergei Martynov said the invitation to newly reelected leader Alexander Lukashenko to attend a Havana summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which unites 100 nations, had been extended by a deputy foreign minister of Cuba.

"Belarus attaches great significance to its participation in the Non-Aligned Movement," Martynov said. "We closely cooperate with all members of this movement, including with Cuba."

The NAM was established in 1961 and held its last summit in Kuala Lumpur in 2003. Malaysia currently chairs the movement, but will hand the post to Cuba in time for the island to preside over a summit in September.

Former collective farm boss Lukashenko, who Washington has dubbed "Europe's last dictator", was reelected to his third presidential term on Sunday with 82.6% of the vote.

Source: RIA Novosti, March 22, 2006; <http://rian.ru>

30. Slovak MP Defends Lukashenko

A member of parliament for the Slovak Communist Party, Dagmar Bollová, defended the hard-line Belarus regime of Alexander Lukashenko at a press conference yesterday.

The conference dealt with the recent presidential elections in Belarus and had been called by László Nagy, the chairman of the Slovak parliamentary Human Rights Committee, and Balázs Jarábik of the Pontis Foundation NGO.

Nagy and Bollová were the only Slovak MPs to visit Belarus as members of an OSCE team of election observers. According to the SME daily, while Nagy criticized the course of the elections, Bollová defended Lukashenko, the incumbent president, who won the vote with more than 80 percent support. The international community has cast doubt on the results.

Bollová argued that there is no totalitarian regime in Belarus, and told a story about how Nagy had wanted to take a photograph at a polling station but had been stopped by a local policeman. While Nagy asked what law prevented him from taking pictures, Bollová told the officer that photography was Nagy's hobby, convincing him to allow the Slovak MP to take a snapshot.

Jarábik said he was not surprised by the communist MP's interpretation of the Belarus regime, noting that Bollová had also spoken on Belarus TV in support of Lukashenko.

Nagy said that the demonstrations in support of the Belarus opposition forces in Minsk are a sign that the people of Belarus are overcoming their fear of the Lukashenko regime.

Source: Martina Jurinová; The Slovak Spectator; March 22, 2006; <http://www.slovakspectator.sk/>

31. Klaus Not To Congratulate Lukashenko on Re-election As President

Prague- Czech President Vaclav Klaus will not congratulate his Belarussian counterpart Alexander Lukashenko on re-election as president, Presidential Office spokesman Petr Hajek said today.

According to Klaus, the course of the presidential elections on Sunday confirmed his fears for democracy in Belarus. Klaus expressed his concern in a letter to Lukashenko last year but he has not yet received an answer from him, Hajek said.

According to Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observers, the elections did not meet its criteria and international standards.

In his last year's letter, Klaus criticised very disputable circumstances of the parliamentary elections and the changes in the constitution that allowed Lukashenko to run for the post again after two election terms.

In his letter, Klaus also criticised the violation of fundamental civic rights and freedoms and the persecution of the Belarussian opposition.

"The situation before the recent presidential elections and their course have led Klaus to believe that his reservations about the situation in Belarus are fully valid," Hajek said.

The European Union denounced the Sunday presidential elections in Belarus on Monday. According to the EU foreign ministers, the elections were not just and were marked by systematic intimidation of opposition politicians and activists. The minister postponed the decision on possible sanctions against the regime of President Lukashenko until their next meeting.

Czech Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda proposed that the EU invite Belarussian opposition leader Alyaksander Milinkevich to Brussels to attend a EU summit at the end of this week. However, the reaction to his proposal was reserved.

Svoboda then carried out talks with the European People's Party (EPP) leadership on inviting Milinkevich at its meeting that will take place on Thursday prior to the EU summit. The party is to pay travel costs for him.

Svoboda believes that his proposal would be the best reaction to the rigged elections.

"It would be stronger than anything else if Milinkevich meets with the EU prime minister immediately after the elections, who would tell him that they consider him as a partner and how much democracy means for them. In my view, this is the next correct step," Svoboda told journalists.

Source: Ceskenoviny.Cz; march 21, 2006; <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz>

32. US Does Not Accept Belarus Election Results

The United States does not accept results of the Belarus election and believes the campaign that re-elected President Alexander Lukashenko was conducted in a "climate of fear," the White House said on Monday.

"We support the call for a new election," said White House spokesman Scott McClellan.

The United States had complained bitterly about events in Belarus ahead of the election.

McClellan warned authorities in Belarus against "threatening or detaining those exercising their political rights in their coming days and beyond," a reference to protests that have been reported there.

"The United States does not accept the results of the election. The election campaign was conducted in a climate of fear. It included arrests and beatings and fraud," McClellan said.

Source: Reuters; March 20, 2006; <http://www.reuters.com>

HUMAN RIGHTS & INDEPENDENT MEDIA

33. Belarus Opposition Says Deputy Attacked

Assailants attacked an aide to the opposition leader in Belarus on Thursday after state TV broadcast a recording of an alleged conversation in which he consulted with a Polish NGO on protest strategies, an opposition spokesman said.

The alleged beating was among the latest incidents in what opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich called a campaign of persecution against Belarusians challenging authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko's re-election.

The vote has been denounced by his domestic opponents and Western critics as deeply undemocratic. Belarusian election officials have rejected formal opposition complaints challenging the vote.

Viktor Korniyenko, a deputy chief on Milinkevich's staff, was beaten by two assailants in the entranceway to his apartment building, Milinkevich spokesman Pavel Mazheika said. The attackers clubbed Korniyenko on the head and he was hospitalized in serious condition, Mazheika said.

On Wednesday, state-run TV broadcast what it characterized as a recorded phone conversation between Korniyenko and a representative of the Batory Foundation, a Poland-based non-governmental organization that has conducted democracy-support programs in Belarus.

The representative told Korniyenko that opposition leaders should not urge a halt to protests on Oktyabrskaya Square and should boost the size of the protest tent camp where young demonstrators are maintaining a constant vigil, according to a transcript of the alleged conversation.

It was printed Thursday on the front page of the newspaper published by Lukashenko's administration.

The state-media reports about the alleged conversation fit in with Lukashenko's repeated claims that the opposition is supported by Western forces seeking to bring him down and control Belarus. State TV has also broadcast reports saying the protests are financed by Western embassies, allegations the diplomatic missions deny.

The Central Election Commission on Thursday declared Lukashenko the official winner of Sunday's election, saying final results showed he received 83 percent of the votes, compared to 6.1 percent for Milinkevich, the state news agency Belta reported. The official results differed little from preliminary results issued Monday.

Milinkevich says Lukashenko's official tally is "monstrously inflated" and is calling for a new vote.

Early Thursday, he told tent camp residents entering the fourth day of a round-the-clock vigil that they had defied expectations by maintaining their vigil as long as they have.

About 200 people occupied part of the freezing downtown square overnight, keeping a toehold for the opposition between rallies that have brought out thousands of people each night this week.

Milinkevich said that although the demonstrations have been comparatively small numerically and have not succeeded in achieving their demand of new elections, they represented a big step forward.

"Nobody had expected what has happened here," he said.

Police have not moved to disperse the protesters, but they have picked up many would-be participants and supporters. The human rights center Vyasna said that more than 150 people have been detained in connection with the protests against the election, some of them released but others tried and sentenced - usually to a week or two behind bars.

"We must defend one another," Milinkevich told a crowd of about 4,000 in Oktyabrskaya Square on Wednesday night. "The authorities are violating the law, they have organized large-scale repression."

Vyasna said Thursday that 20-30 people were detained near the square overnight. The Interior Ministry said police had detained about 15 people over the previous 24 hours for taking part in the unsanctioned protest, the Interfax news agency reported. The ministry declined to comment.

The persistent protest is unprecedented in this former Soviet nation where Lukashenko has been silencing dissent since his first election in 1994, but opposition leaders acknowledge the crowd in a corner of the square is not big enough to force a new election.

Gearing up for a major test of strength, Milinkevich emphasized his call for protesters to come out in force on Saturday, the anniversary of the declaration of the first, short-lived independent Belarusian republic in 1918.

The election in this nation of 10 million between Russia and the expanded EU has set the West against Moscow, which is seeking to revive its influence in the former Soviet Union after Western-backed leaders came to power in Georgia and Ukraine.

Source: Yuras Karmanau, Forbes.Com; March 23, 2006; <http://www.forbes.com>

34. List of Journalists, Prosecuted For Carrying Out Professional Duties

March 14 – 22, 2006

List of Arrested Journalists:

1. Aliaksei Shein (A. Milinkevich's Press Group, Minsk). Sentenced to 5 days of arrest on March 20, 2006.
2. Ihar Bantsar (*Glos Znad Niemna in Exile*, Hrodna). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 21, 2006.
3. Andrzej Pisalnik (*Glos Znad Niemna in Exile*, Hrodna). Sentenced to 12 days of arrest on March 21, 2006. The journalist was detained again after 5 days of arrest. Firstly, A. Pisalnik was sentenced on March 15, 2006.
4. Aliaksei Rads (Internet-resource <http://www.forum.grodno.net>, Hrodna). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 21, 2006.
5. Andrej Pachobut (*Magazyn Polski in Exile*, Hrodna). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 14, 2006.
6. Valery Shchukin (*Narodnaya Vola*, Viciebsk). Sentenced to 7 days of arrest on March 17, 2006.
7. Andrej Dynko (*Nasha Niva*, Minsk). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 22, 2006.
8. Vadzim Aleksandrovich (*Belorusy i Rynok*, Minsk). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 22, 2006.
9. Yury Chavusau (a journalist of the Assembly of NGOs Internet Portal, an author of *Palitychnaya Sfera* and *ARCHE* magazines). Sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 21, 2006.

List of Released Journalists after Arrests:

- 10 Andrej Shantarovich (*Miestnaya Gazeta*, Vaukavysk). The journalist was sentenced to 3 days of arrest on March 18, 2006.
11. Viktor Yarashuk (*Miastovy Chas*, Pinsk). The journalist was sentenced to 5 days of arrest on March 15, 2006. The journalist was detained again by the police on March 23. He has been sentenced to 6 days of arrest.
12. Siarhej Niarouny (*Volny Horad*, Krychau). The journalist was sentenced to 3 days of arrest on March 18, 2006.
13. Mikalaj Gierdziy (*Volny Horad*, Krychau). The journalist was sentenced to 2 days of arrest on March 18, 2006.

List of Fined Journalists:

14. Volha Dziemchanka (*Odnako* newspaper, Minsk). The journalist was fined 20 base amounts (approximately USD 290) on March 21, 2006.
15. Ivan Roman (A *Salidarnasc* newspaper free-lance correspondent). The journalist was fined 2 base amounts on March 20, 2006. The journalist was threatened with a gun at the Piershamajski District Department of Internal Affairs in Minsk by some unknown civilian (!). On March 23, 2006 the journalist was detained again by the police in Hrodna for no apparent reason. Presently, he is waiting for a court decision.

List of Arrested Foreign Journalists:

16. Andrij Lubka (*Karpatski Holos*, Ukraine). The journalist was sentenced to 15 days of arrest on March 22, 2006.
17. Dzmitry Hurnevich (a *Radio Polonia* (Poland) free-lance correspondent). The journalist was sentenced to 10 days of arrest on March 21 (22?), 2006.

List of Kidnapped Journalists (the police tell nothing about their places of detention)

18. Siarhej Salash (an *Offside* newspaper journalist (Barysau), A. Milinkevich's Election Team activist). The journalist was detained in Minsk on March 22, 2006.
19. Anton Taras (a free-lance correspondent). The journalist was detained in Minsk on March 23, 2006.
20. Alena Lukashevich (a free-lance correspondent). The journalist was detained in Minsk on March 23, 2006.

Discharged Journalist

18. Siarzhuk Sierabro (*Vitsiebski Courier*, Vitsiebsk). It has been the only case so far, when a judge decided to release a journalist and acknowledged that the correspondent carried out his professional duties.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists*; March 22, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

35. Brest Police Arrested HR Activist Again

Brest police arrested Uladzimir Vialichkin, member of Viasna, again. He has just served his term of 5 days on fabricated charges of using obscene language in a public place. Today he was supposed to be released. However, the police officers drove him from jail straight to the police station where they again charged him with disorderly conduct (Art 156). Allegedly, Vialichkin swore at the policeman who escorted him. This time he was sentenced to 7 days in jail.

Source: *Charter97*; March 22, 2006; <http://www.charter97.org/eng/>

36. Reporters Without Borders and Belarusian Association of Journalists Condemn Lack of Opposition Access to Media

Reporters Without Borders and the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) today condemned the Belarusian government's refusal to allow opposition candidates equal access to the country's media during the recent election campaign which saw President Alexander Lukashenko re-elected by over 80% of the vote in very tense circumstances.

They accused the authorities of "very serious attacks on press freedom during the entire campaign." They noted that the press was almost entirely controlled by the president and simply relayed government propaganda, which Lukashenko had said was its proper role.

The two organisations accused the authorities of snuffing out freedom of expression during the election and muzzling the press to ensure Lukashenko's victory. They called on the international community to urgently press the Belarusian government to punish these actions and to promote media diversity in Belarus.

Press freedom violations during the campaign and the actual vote.

- The authorities have systematically hounded the independent media for nearly two years. Only two weeklies, *BelGazeta* and *Belorusy i Rynok*, have been allowed to get printed and freely distributed in Belarus and they only have a small circulation. The majority of other papers have been forced underground.

- During the campaign, two papers harassed by the regime tried to publish manifestos of opposition presidential candidates. The authorities seized 250,000 copies on 3 March of an issue of the independent paper *Narodnaya Volya* (already banned from sale and distribution) devoted to candidate Alexander Kazulin. On 17 March, two days before the election, the opposition paper *Tovarishch*, which had disappeared from circulation in recent months, came out with a special print-run of 200,000 about the manifesto of candidate Alexander Milinkevich. Police immediately seized all the copies.

- The largely state-controlled press echoes the opinions of President Lukashenko. A special issue of the president's paper, *Sovietskaya Biélorussia*, printed more than 800,000 copies of an issue on 15 March exclusively about Lukashenko's manifesto.

- The president dominates the country's entirely state-run TV stations, appearing there nearly every day since the start of the campaign. He made a long speech of nearly three hours on 2 March at the opening of a special session of an All-Belarusian People's Congress. The biggest TV station, BT, broadcast the whole speech, which was about the government's economic

achievements and Lukashenko's development plans for the next five years. It re-broadcast half the speech in news programmes that evening and the next day.

- The BAJ says the news programme *Nashi Novosti*, on the government TV station ONT, gave 89.6% of its air time over to presidential election candidates between 21 February and 4 March. But candidates Milinkevich and Sergei Gaidukevich were not mentioned at all and Kazulin got just 0.4% of the air time. BT gave 58% of its coverage to Lukashenko and only 0.1% to Kazulin and 0.2% to Milinkevich. The elections commission only stipulated brief coverage for all the candidates, of two half-hour programmes each during the entire campaign.

- As well as being excluded from the media, the opposition was also denigrated by the authorities. A report by BT on 20 March about a meeting of opposition supporters disputing the official results called the protesters "queers" and said organisers had handed out beer to them.

- Access to several opposition websites was blocked on election day (19 March), probably by official order. The opposition Charter 97 site (<http://www.charter97.org>) came under a "denial of service" technical attack that shut it down from 4 p.m. until next day at 11 a.m. Its editor, Natalya Radina, told Reporters Without Borders that the site had been similarly attacked during the 2001 presidential campaign and the 2004 referendum. The website of the US-funded *Radio Svoboda* (<http://www.svoboda.org>) only became accessible again on 20 March at 1 p.m. and opposition candidates' sites <http://www.milinkevich.org> and "<http://www.kozylin.com> at 10 a.m. that day.

- The authorities refused to allow critical journalists into the country to cover the elections, including Laure Mandeville, of the French daily *Le Figaro*, who was refused a visa and told in an official letter that she had written lies about the situation in Belarus. Between 20 February and 17 March, at least four journalists from the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Radio Bialystok* were deported. Three other journalists from the Ukrainian TV stations 1+1, Tonis and 5Kanal were also expelled after covering a meeting in support of candidate Milinkevich.

- At least four other Ukrainian and Polish journalists were arrested and sentenced to between five and 10 days in prison between 12 and 15 March. Andrej Poczobut, editor of the Polish magazine *Polski na Uchodźstwie*, has been held since 14 March officially accused of "hooliganism." He has gone on hunger-strike and is also refusing water to protest against his imprisonment. He was taken to hospital for treatment on 19 March.

Source: *Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 22, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>*

37. Belarus Election Protesters Wary of Police

Inga made a stack of pancakes, packed them carefully in her bag and sped to a small tent camp in the center of Minsk, eager to provide homemade food to opposition activists.

But her plans were cut short by beefy police officers who intercepted the 19-year-old student, locked her in a detention cell and force-fed her all the food she had prepared.

"I was crying already after the third pancake, but they laughed and said, 'Keep going!'" Inga, who declined to give her last name out for fear of being expelled from her university, told *The Associated Press* on Wednesday.

Despite widespread fears, Belarusian law enforcers so far have not taken any direct action to disperse demonstrators camped out in one of the capital's central squares since Sunday, when authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko overwhelmingly won a third term in a vote the opposition and the West dismissed as rigged.

Instead, activists say, authorities have resorted to detaining, harassing and otherwise intimidating scores of protesters on the sidelines of the square - including support people like Inga who keep the demonstration going by providing food, clothing and other necessities.

Irina Dorofeichuk, a 36-year-old management teacher, was sentenced to seven days on charges of hooliganism after police officers accused her of cursing. The real reason, she says, is that she was carrying food and warm clothing to the protesters.

"I didn't believe that something like that could happen to me in the 21st century in Europe," Dorofeichuk told AP. "All the authorities want is to humiliate your human dignity."

Residents of the tiny tent camp are feeling the authorities' pressure in other ways. Lights on the usually festive square were turned off, prompting protesters to light their tent city with candles.

On Wednesday, city workers welded shut a sewage hatch that protesters had been using as a toilet. Many fear this will make them more vulnerable to detention by policemen when the activists leave the camp.

Activist Mikhail Avdeyev experienced that firsthand. He said he was going to buy a pack of cigarettes when three riot policemen beat him up. He showed an AP reporter multiple bruises on his face and chest. "They beat and treat you like dogs," he said bitterly.

Police declined to comment on whether they would resort to force to disperse the protesters. But riot police regiment commander Yury Podobed told reporters that the rally would not be suppressed, the Interfax news agency reported.

At any rate, the number of protesters seemed insufficient to push the government for political change. Alexander Milinkevich, the main opposition candidate who challenged Lukashenko, has told activists they had already scored a huge victory by speaking out against the authorities.

Many activists intended to keep up their protest.

"They beat me up, but I am still standing here for Belarus," Avdeyev said. "No matter how many blues, bruises, cuts and shots on my body I will stay here till the end with everybody, with my brothers and sisters who want freedom for our Belarus."

After the results of Sunday's election were announced, thousands of protesters thronged the square calling for a new vote - an unprecedented act in Belarus, which has a history of imprisoning opposition figures and violently breaking up rallies.

Even though the number of protesters is much smaller than the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators who ushered opposition leaders to power in Georgia and Ukraine, authorities are still intent on curbing the protest, which they see as embarrassing.

*Source: Yuras Karmanau, Seattle Post-Intelligencer; March 22, 2006;
<http://seattlepi.nwsources.com/>*

38. The *Nasha Niva* Editor-in-Chief Sentenced to 10 Days of Arrest

March 22, 2006 The Savietski District Court of Minsk sentenced Andrej Dynko, the *Nasha Niva* Editor-in-Chief to 10 days of administrative arrest for "a minor act of hooliganism." The judge Alena Krajchyk got convinced by the evidence of two policemen, who stated that the Editor-in-chief "was cursing and didn't react on repeated remarks of policemen" in the Kastychnitskaya Square on March 21, 2006.

The judge took into consideration the policemen's arguments (Mr. Shyshko and Mr. Pochtennyj), despite the fact they were contradictory. Thus, e.g. the policemen mentioned different places, where they detained A. Dynko.

At the same time, the judge fully ignored the evidence provided by two witnesses –Vieranika Dziadok and Ales Kudrytski. The colleagues of Andre Dynko were going to the Kastychnitskaya Square in the same route bus and saw the moment of his detention. In one voice, they told the

riot policemen pushed the journalist back to the route bus immediately after he had got off. Thus, the latter simply didn't have a mere possibility to commit the mentioned administrative tort.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 22, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

39. A Polonia Radio Station Free-Lance Correspondent Got Detained

Dzmitry Hurnievich, a Polonia Radio Station free-lance correspondent got detained in Minsk on March 21, 2006. According to Radio Liberty, the journalist was covering the protest action in the Kastychnitskaya Square. D. Hurnievich was convoyed to the Minsk-located Frunzienski District Department of Internal Affairs. Some time later he was sentenced to 10 days of administrative arrest.

Source: Belarusian Association of Journalists; March 22, 2006; <http://www.baj.ru/>

40. Dozens of Protesters Arrested in Belarus

The authorities arrested dozens of protesters today, including prominent opposition figures, in an effort to squelch public protests over the declared victory of President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko in Sunday's presidential election.

Protesters gathered for a third day in October Square here after a couple of hundred of them defied official warnings and camped out on the square overnight, unmolested by the police.

The arrests, however, appeared to have their intended effect as the size of the protests dwindled considerably after as many as 10,000 assembled on Sunday night in one of the largest public expressions of dissent since Mr. Lukashenko took office in 1994. By this evening, by contrast, only 2,000 to 3,000 appeared, undeterred by the snow, wind and subfreezing temperatures.

Anatoly V. Lebedko, an opposition leader and ally of the main opposition challenger, Aleksandr Milinkevich, was arrested early this morning near the square. He appeared in court later today and was sentenced to 15 days in jail for having organized an unsanctioned protest, his aides said.

The total number of arrests remained unclear, and the Interior Ministry did not respond to requests for information. But Mr. Milinkevich said that 108 protesters had been arrested overnight and today.

Among other prominent leaders were Aleksandr Dobrovolsky and Alyaksei Yanukevich, both close advisers to Mr. Milinkevich. Their fate remained unclear tonight. Mr. Milinkevich's two sons were detained early today while trying to bring food and clothes to those camped overnight, but quickly released.

"What the authorities are trying to do is arrest them one by one so there is no forceful attempt to clear the square while the television cameras are here," another Milinkevich adviser, Viktor Ivashkevich, said in an interview at the square today, where the spirited, if dwindling, crowd continued to wave flags and play music, demanding that Mr. Lukashenko go.

Mr. Lukashenko's election to a third, five-year term has been condemned as illegitimate in Europe and the United States but defended by Russia, this country's largest neighbor and ally. Mr. Lukashenko, who the government says received 82 percent of the vote, has responded with defiance.

In an appearance on Monday, he dismissed criticism that the police were going after campaign workers — including as many as 300 who were arrested in the days before the vote — and said the authorities had an obligation to arrest anyone who violated the law. "The law is the law for everybody," he said.

Mr. Lukashenko said his government had allowed the opposition a chance to demonstrate, even though he called their assembly a provocation, but the arrests seemed to indicate that his patience was wearing thin.

The police, in uniform and plain clothes, arrested many protesters as they came to or left the square, including Mr. Lebedko and Mr. Dobrovolsky, who were stopped as they tried to return early today, said a deputy of theirs, Lyudmilla Gryaznova, who was with them.

Mr. Milinkevich, who, officially, received only 6 percent of the vote, urged the protesters to continue. But in a reflection of his concern over the risk of his own arrest, he emphasized that he was not organizing the protesters. Even among his staff, there were signs of divisions over whether he should encourage the protesters to hold the square, risking a confrontation with the police.

"We stayed here all night," Mr. Milinkevich told the protesters this afternoon, after moving through the makeshift camp, which consisted of a dozen tents pitched on the cold, hard tiles. "It was the night of the birth of democracy in Belarus. It is a demonstration that we are people."

This evening, he urged people to gather each evening and again en masse on Saturday, the anniversary of the declaration of a short-lived independent Republic of Belarus in 1918 that is celebrated by nationalists here, but not by Mr. Lukashenko's government.

"Call your friends, neighbors," Mr. Milinkevich said. "We want to show on the 25th that we are a force and that we will win."

Christine Hauser contributed reporting from New York for this article.

*Source: Steven Lee Myers, C. J. Chivers, The New York Times; March 21, 2006;
<http://www.nytimes.com/>*

41. Belarus Protesters Turn to Internet

In the wake of Belarus' presidential election, which the opposition says was rigged in favour of President Alexander Lukashenko, critics of the government are struggling to spread the word about their protests.

The opposition has very limited media resources at its disposal.

Most of the independent press has been forced out of business. TV is entirely under state control.

The internet has provided an outlet for independent reporting.

Since Sunday, several sites have run eyewitness accounts from the anti-Lukashenko protests.

One, Charter 97, has a picture of Parliament Square in Minsk on its front page - with the time 1830 and the date 21 March - encouraging people to join the rally.

A banner reads: "We Want a New One!" referring to the presidential election. The words are printed against denim - the symbol the protesters are using for what they have hopefully dubbed their "Blue Revolution".

State sarcasm

On Monday evening, the site ran regular reports on events in Parliament Square - saying that at least 20,000 people were there - a higher estimate than that given by other sources.

Pictures snapped at the protest have been posted to image-hosting sites like Flickr.

But for the moment at least, these efforts are unlikely to worry the authorities too greatly - with only a small fraction of people in Belarus having regular access to the internet.

As for state TV, it has so far shown no pictures of Monday's rally - instead it continues to run a sarcastic report on the protests on Sunday night, portraying them as the work of a drunken rabble.

Source: Sebastian Usher, BBC News; March 21, 2006; <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

BUSINESS

42. Belarus' External Trade Grows 39.2 Per Cent in January 2006

The external trade of the Republic of Belarus rose 39.2 per cent in January from the same time last year to USD 2,9 billion, the ministry of statistics told BelTA.

The exports went up 32.8 per cent to USD 1,5 billion while the imports surged 46.7 per cent reaching USD 1,4 billion. The trade surplus made USD 89,6 million.

The external trade in January accounted for USD 2,671 billion with exports at USD 1,339 and imports at USD 1,332. The export's value spiraled by 36.3 per cent from last January and import's value – by 51.1 per cent. The growth came on the back of a significant increase in the value of supplies of oil products, tires and trucks.

Last year Belarusian commercial entities traded with 129 countries. Belarus exported merchandise to 100 countries and imported goods from 114 countries. Belarus' main partners were Russia (47.2 per cent of the total trade turnover), the Netherlands, Ukraine, Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Poland and China.

According to the balance of payments method, in January the foreign trade in services neared USD 231.8 million, 7.6 per cent up on January 2005. The export of services went up by 7.6 per cent to a total of USD 154.8 million, import – by 7.5 per cent to make USD 77 million.

Source: Belarusian Telegraph Agency; March 22, 2006; <http://www.belta.by/engnews.nsf>

The Belarus Update is a weekly news bulletin of the International League for Human Rights (www.ilhr.org). The League, now in its 63rd year, is a New York-based human rights NGO in consultative status with the United Nations and the International Labor Organization. To send letters to the Editor or to subscribe/unsubscribe please contact Maria Kabalina at cis@ilhr.org.

The Belarus project was established to support Belarusian citizens in making their case for the protection of civil society before the international community regarding Lukashenko's wholesale assault on human rights and the rule of law in Belarus.
